Feb ~~June~~ 1959 — Swamp Dwellers — Lion + the Jewel > 41 perfs

March 1960 — Swamp Dwellers — on Radio
(The Hunt) — Okonjo de Hunter, pudgin
Poisoners of the World Unite

July 3 — Through Your Hat (mention of Roots) — ~~gives~~ starts radio series
Dialer remark — ref to Fifth Tale — 1960 — (stage) Honga Audience to Perform
The Future of W. Afr. writing

Aug 6 "My Father's Burden" on WNTV
Sept 11 The Old Boys' Dinner Speech"
Sept 18 Oga Look Properly — Camwood on the Leaves — specially commissioned by Radio Nigeria for Independ
Sept 25
Dec 4, 1960 — "Pain Land of Flesh + Blood" — Talking Through Your Hat
2 Jan
Jan 22, 1961 "Afr. Personality" talk — Dance of the Forests
Tortoise — ~~Anancy~~ ~~story~~ play on TV — a Western
Nov. 6 — squib about his return from Pa

~~Jan~~ — 1961 — "Season" ex Hon
"Committee man"

March 1961 — Drum story on Nigeria's Bernard Shaw

Aug 1961 — Dum ant — A Change of Heart

1962 — Death at Dawn
1962 — Epitaph for Sony Tokyo Kid —

2

May 19, 1963 — Camwood on the Leave (repeat)

July 1963 — Ways of a Rebel

THE EARLY WRITINGS OF WOLE SOYINKA

Bernth Lindfors

Wole Soyinka's first books appeared only eleven years ago, in 1963. Since that time he has earned an international reputation as one of Africa's most abundantly gifted writers. Prolific and versatile, he has published eleven plays, a collection of satirical dramatic sketches, two volumes of poetry, two novels, a translation of D.O. Fagunwa's first fictional narrative, an autobiographical work based on his experiences in prison during the Nigerian civil war, and numerous essays on literary, social and political matters. But what is most impressive about this extraordinary output is not its gross quantity but its fine quality; Soyinka is the only highly productive African author writing in English whose works do not reek of stale journalistic sweat. He is neither a compulsive hack like Cyprian Ekwensi nor an inveterate autobiographer like Ezekiel Mphahlele nor an incontinent clown like Taban lo Liyong. His imagination, vision and craft distinguish him as a creative artist of the very first rank, as a writer of world stature. Some would say he is the only truly original literary genius that Africa has yet produced.

His prodigious talent has not gone unrecognized by scholars and critics. Three critical books and one study guide on his writings have recently been published, and he is featured prominently in nearly every serious appraisal of modern African drama, poetry and fiction. Indeed, no survey of contemporary African literature would be complete without at least one chapter devoted to Soyinka's writings. He is already a classic, already a monument in the pantheon of African letters.

But though his life and works have been subjected to careful academic scrutiny, no one has given much attention to his early formative period as a writer. Little is known about his

literary activities prior to 1960, when he returned to Nigeria after completing a B.A. in English at the University of Leeds and working for three years in London as a bartender, bouncer, substitute high school English teacher, and script-reader at the Royal Court Theatre. Even less is known about the writing he did before leaving for England in 1954, and not much has been said about how he spent his year in Ibadan as a Rockefeller Research Fellow in 1960-61. This paper will attempt to fill in a few of these large lacunae in Soyinka's literary career by examining some of his unknown writings.

Soyinka's first published works probably appeared in annuals or literary magazines at Government College, Ibadan, the elite secondary school he attended before enrolling in 1952 in a preliminary course necessary for entry into University College Ibadan. It is known that he continued to "house" magazines at Government College, but his contributions have never been exhumed and discussed, probably because copies of these publications are now extremely hard to find. In an interview recorded in August 1962, Soyinka said:

> I would say I began writing seriously, or rather taking myself seriously, taking my writing seriously about three, four years ago, but I can only presume that I have always been interested in writing. In school I wrote the usual little sketches for production, the occasional verse, you know, the short story, etc., and I think about 1951 I had the great excitement, of having a short story of mine broadcast on the Nigerian Broadcasting Service and that was sort of my first public performance.

One wonders if the story Soyinka remembers as his "first public performance" was "Keffi's Birthday Treat," a brief narrative broadcast on the Children's Programme of the Nigerian Broadcasting Service's National

Programme and published in one of the earliest issues of the Nigerian Radio Times in July 1954. Even if "Keffi's Birthday Treat" is a later radio contribution, it may be significant as Soyinka's first short story to be published in a national magazine. Earlier stories may have appeared in high school and university publications, but these would not have been available to the general public. "Keffi's Birthday Treat" was very likely Soyinka's first public performance in print, if not on the air.

The story is a charming vignette telling of a young boy's attempt to treat himself to a visit to the University College Zoo in Ibadan on his tenth birthday. Here is the entire 850 word text, which must have taken about five minutes to read on the Children's Programme:

Indent. Double-space throughout.

"KEFFI'S BIRTHDAY TREAT"

"I'll be ten tomorrow," said Keffi to himself as he lay in bed, staring at the ceiling of his home in Yaba.

(A) — Insert here double-spaced and indented

What is most appealing about this story is the delightful combination of gentle humor, suspense and drama Soyinka manages to achieve in less than a thousand words. He is essentially telling a joke or humorous anecdote but he never allows the comedy to get out of control. He deftly builds up an air of excitement around the boy's escapade, inserts a few good laughs toward the end, and finishes with a punch line which Lagos and Ibadan listeners would especially appreciate. The University College Zoo at Ibadan, which was opened in the early 1950s, has always been a favorite tourist attraction for Nigerians, so Soyinka's story about a young boy's curiosity to see wild animals would have appealed to a wide radio audience, not just

to children. "Keffi's Birthday Treat" was topical and entertaining, a harbinger of the creative harvest to come.

Soyinka's first contribution to campus publications at University College Ibadan appears to have been a poem entitled "Thunder to Storm" published in the second issue of The University Voice, the official organ of the Student's Union, in January 1953. (Soyinka would have been 18 years old at this time.) Written in rather jerky iambic tetrameter couplets with occasional slant rhymes and awkward syntax, the poem describes the impact of a brief but devastating tropical storm on a seaside community somewhere in Africa. One could say that "Thunder to Storm" bears a vague resemblance in narrative strategy to eighteenth and nineteenth century English meditative verse devoted to pondering man's relationship with his natural environment, but specific comparisons would be ludicrous because Soyinka's poem lacks art. Indeed, his craftsmanship is so crude and his tone so uncertain that one frequently cannot tell if some of the comical side-effects are accidental or deliberate. One imagines Soyinka's puckish grin somewhere beneath the fractured surface but it is conceivable that this 98-line jingle was actually intended as a serious poem. Certainly it is the most juvenile of his juvenilia. To prove the point, here is the whole catastrophic cloudburst, with every minor typographical disaster preserved:

Thunder to Storm

A low, long rumble from the sky,
That dwindled off into a sigh.
Querying eyes looked up. The sky was clear.

etc. (B)

The University Voice, 2 (Jan 1953), 21.

Poem- Thunder To Storm.

A. O. SOYINKA

A low, long rumble from the sky.
That dwindled off into a sigh.
Querying eyes looked up. The sky was clear.
And this of course soon quelled all fear.
No heavy cloud, the day was bright,
So thought they all. but none was right.
Said two young boys, "we'll go for wood,
When we return, we'll have some food"
"I'll hurry home," a woman said,
"I've got to put my babe to bed".
Boasted one man. "I'll win this game,
In chess I have a lot of fame".
The homeless tramp, he laughed and shrugged
He'd had no luck, and on he jogged.
The fishermen upon the sea,
They hauled their nets for all to see.
The rich old man watched them at work,
From his near home, he mused, "what luck!"
About their daily tasks they went
All were happy, all content.

Then hell broke loose; the bright clear sky
Was covered up, dense clouds rolled by.
Quite soon their heavy tears they'd shed
And down below the humans fled.
Huge streaks of lightning flashed about
As if the whole world they would rout.
And down to earth, a march with the wind
'Twas all-destroying, nowhere kind.
This tree was stubborn, down it went
Poles and cables, them it bent.
This house stood firm, it soon crashed in;
And with the wind went the dust-bin.
Some roofs were slack and off they went
To some far place by the wind sent
Electric wires soon were cut
They'd stood for years, their pride was hurt.
The dead alone were free from this,
But wait! They would not have this bliss.
Into the graveyard the wind marched
And for a mighty tree it searched.
It soon found one — its great shadow
Had sheltered graves – but no ado.
A deafening crash and down it fell.
The ghosts cried out, "This's worse than hell."
Its long stout roots all gave a tug
Up came the graves without a clog.
Its mighty trunk on others crashed
And round the wreckage the wind lashed.

Then came a lull – nerves were on edge
The wind seemed shamed of its sacrilege.
All things stood still, all places quiet;
Was that the end – none could say yet.
But when the people's hopes had soared,
The winds unfurled, the thunder roared,
"We do but rest and muster strength
You'll fell our mighty arm at length."
And so again the elements marched
The ground was sodden where once was parched.
Imams called 'Allah', Christians, 'Lord';
On blew the wind by their stouts bored.
Twisting, felling, crashing, breaking,
Tearing, smashing – all destroying.
"Forgive our sins", they cried with tears
They had not called on God for years.

Spent and weary the wind retired,
So did the rain; the clouds were tired.
Behold the sky – already bright
Could one believe it spelt such plight?
But look below – this is no fun.
But scene of sorrow, sight for mourn.
Dead bodies – torn and mangled
'Neath the cables bent and tangled.
The woman who some time before
Had hurried – making for her door;
The two chess-players who'd been so well
They reached home safe but their home fell;
Two little boys who went for wood
They too were in a happy mood:
The merry tramp for shelter fled
The friendly tree his body bled:
The fisherman who'd worked all day
He did not see the sun's next ray:
The rich old man who'd loved the sea
The sea grew rough and claimed him fee:
The quiet families at home
Thought they were safe; no more they. droam.
Some killed by lightning, some by walls
Some smashed by trees, none heard their falls
Electric wires by trees were cut
Some touched them and – that was their lot!
The homeless wept when morning broke
But what of those who never woke?
They little thought so soon they'd leave
Their loved ones for them to grieve.
The child no more his mum could call;
Why do they poke beneath the wall?
The wife no more her spouse would storm
He 'd gone off in a thunderstorm.

No surer proof can be given by a man of his own littleness than disbelief in Great men.

THOMAS CARLISLE

It is a wonder that young Soyinka, after composing this uninspired undergraduate doggerel, managed to escape being struck down by one of Shango's thunderbolts.

In 1953-54, his second and last year at University College Ibadan before leaving for Leeds, Soyinka was involved in a number of campus activities which made demands on his literary abilities. As an enthusiastic member of the Progressive Party, a student political organization set up in opposition to the more powerful student Dynamic Party, he took over the editorship of The Eagle, an irregular cyclostyled newsheet of campus commentary and humor. Three issues edited by him can be found in the Africana collection of the Ibadan University library. Each begins with a half-page cartoon (drawn by a student named Bodede) and a column of quips and queries called "Sheezy Nosey Wants to Know." Some of the things Sheezy Nosey wanted to know in Soyinka's years as editor were:

--Why people say, "I'm on the level" -- as if a level-crossing is not the same as a double-crossing.

--Why we no longer have poached eggs in the mornings. Or have the game-keepers grown too vigilant?

--If the average 'Dynamic' councillor was drunk when he stood elections. Or have students not heard of the Dynamite, who when reminded that a council meeting was in progress said, "Get away! Do you think I have time for nothing else?" -- very illustrative of the 'Dynamic' sense of duty.

--Whether every student knows he is first a student before being a noisemaker and when we will save lecturers the energy expended in begging for silence.

--Whether students know it is [illegible]

--Whether the use of pyjamas on the Bar Beach was that its variegated colours attracted sea-anemones and agamemnones from their beds into the research nets.

--Whether students know it is hitting below the belt to refer disparagingly to a stewards's office when he is getting the better of you in an affably begun argument over the evil effects or otherwise of drinking [redacted] ice-cold water after hot tea.

--Whether there is not a great gap between a "gentleman" and a gentle man.

--How many students make one Union and how many Unions make one University College.

--How much you enjoy reading the "Eagle".

Soyinka also wrote an editorial column on page two in which he commented on campus affairs. In his first issue he used some of this space to welcome incoming freshmen and to outline the editorial policy of *The Eagle*, which he called "the cleanest paper for reading in this college":

> The policy of the paper differs from the others in this, that we believe more in attacking general faults than in putting individuals to ridicule. This does not mean that we never attack individuals; we do this when it is necessary, but never vilely or with personal animosity showing in every line of it. We concentrate on trying to raise the general standard of behaviour among students, and at the same time, give them the most interesting articles to read.

In the first two issues he edited, Soyinka remained true to this policy by using his editorial column to scold fellow students for failing to turn up at meetings on time, to thank faculty and staff for giving student hitchhikers lifts to and from campus, to congratulate the Dynamic Party for its decisive students' council election victory, and to reprimand [redacted] *The Sword*, another campus publication, for indulging in smear

tactics against its critics. However, by the time the third issue of The Eagle materialized, Soyinka's patience with the antics of some of his peers had been exhausted by a personal incident which he took very seriously and which prompted him to let loose the full fury of his tongue in an editorial entitled "Reptiles." The piece is worth quoting in toto, for it reveals the impassioned rhetoric of which the 19-year-old Soyinka was capable:

REPTILES

I hate snakes. I hate all reptiles with a hatred that is born of fear. That is why I'm writing this. That, in fact, is why I have stayed on this term merely to write this Editorial, which is about the only thing I have done in the production of this issue.

I'd rather face an infuriated bull -- then, at least, I can see what's coming to me. But a snake, a vile venomous, slimy, disgusting creature who will strike and disappear before you can say "Jumping Rattlesnakes"....

Some days ago, a student killed two snakes and a scorpion -- all in one night! He was quite amazed, for he hadn't believed th there were so many reptiles in the Campus. How many people think the same way! And that is precisely what makes reptiles so dangerous. Until the last holidays I, too, did not realize that the college had so many of them. But we do! They exist in shirts and trousers, they browse in the library and behave like gentlemen.

When the BISI TAIWO -- BOZO gang, hiding under the cloak of anonimity, scored personal hits off the "Embassy" members, severa students said it was "Fair Comments". I ask such students if they will still make the same defence for them when they learn that these cowardly creatures, or members of the same 'genus', wr letters to friends of the Embassy maligning the members most

callously, and concocting stories, compared with which Russian propaganda is child's play. These letters, I may add, were written mostly to girl-friends of the Embassy Clubmembers.

I called them snakes. Yes, only a snake's brain could have thought of a description like "wriggling her waist like a wounded snake". I know that BISI TAIWO is a jilted aspirant, as were many of the horrified "Puritans". But surely it was carrying vindictiveness too far, TO WRITE AN ANONYMOUS LETTER to that girl's principal embellishing and painting luridly an incident at which civilized people would not have batted an eyelid. What did you hope to gain? The credit of having ruined a girl's career by engineering her dismissal from her school?

Contemptible creatures--too mean to be noticed, too dangerous to be ignored! The fountain-heads of morals, uprightness and virtues. Self-imposed judges, most competent, since, being master of all vices, you can smell a little fault one mile off and, what's better, placard it 120 miles towards the Coast. Your cowardice threw the former Editor of "Bug" into disrepute; for a long time he was thought to be the writer of the anonymous letter. Rather than correct the opinion, you encouraged it, because it put you above suspicion.

But I warn you, stop playing with poison gas. We have enough snakes in this college without your belly-crawlers who fawn in public and strike behind.

Vituperation of this sort, however, was rare in The Eagle. Most contributions were light-hearted and amusing, even when they were jabs at the absurdities and bad manners of fellow students. Since many of these pieces were anonymous or signed with pseudonyms, it is possible that a good number were written by Soyinka's friends and acquaintances, but he himself set the dominant tone with his editorials, regular columns and numerous witty

vignettes and fillers. One can use his signed contributions as a guide to identification of the articles he wrote incognito. Here, for example, is an unsigned anecdote which is characteristic of his playful style:

SORRY PARTNER

Once upon a time, I went to play tennis on the tennis court (some play it on the table, you know.) Well, my partner was just as good a player as I -- that is, the very worst. He wielded his racket like a blunderbuss and once or twice sent his racket into the football field. That didn't worry me. It was when I saw that he was a confirmed die-hard sorry-partnerer that sweat began to stand out on my forehead li icicles.

I was embarrassed. Why? Because I was playing just as badly as he and there he was, apologising for every bad stroke he played. In vain I assured him that the essence of tennis is not in apologies, but he insisted, and poured out his Sorrys as if he had all the sorrows of Satan in his pocket.

The short of it was that, in the long run, he became so effusive that I took the offensive. Boy oh Boy! Did I sorry-partner him or did I? When, (he standing at the net) I hit the ball into his rudder, I porry-sartnered him. When, attempting to take a fast one, I skated, jitter-burged and eventually landed on my cusher, I torry-parsnered him before he could open his mouth. When, (a liver fluke it was), He hit a super-tonic one that took our opponent on the kisser, I Tory-gardenere him. (You see, by this time I didn't know what I was talking again.)

Even when he groaned (as he always did when hitting a ball), I sorry-portnered him. I'm telling you that I very-pestered him so ruthlessly that he capitulated and took refuge in a passing car.

That's what to do to them!

Also, as far as anonymous poetry is concerned, one would be willing to swear

based on copious evidence in "Thunder to Storm," that the following rhymed lines bear all the earmarks of the wild and Wole idiom:

THE BANJO'S BROKEN STRING

A Hall Three disaster
Hapt after siesta.
Ukelele Banjo
Woke with the cry, "My Joe!
I'll betcha my last dime
For high tea it's high time."
He went for a quick bath
Gave his tooth a quick bruth --
That is how he said 'brush'
When his tooth had -- but s-sh!
His brush played a bad joke
His false tooth in two broke.
The poor lad his tooth eyed,
Said, "Thou wasth my greath pride."
He fixed back the top half
To tea went with a loud laugh.

But worse hapt at tea quaff,
The top part too came off.
My lad thought 'twas sugar
Or hardened vinegar,
And being a good Christian,
He swallowed his pride. When
this Banjo was ex-rayed,
This was the report made:--

"Long after a ray-look
Up and down his stommick,

We found his false fangus
In his oesophagus."
Signed -- X-Ray Man, Tagus.

Even if these two attributions are incorrect, even if Soyinka never wrote inspired trivia about tennis or teeth, he must be given credit for having encouraged such nonsense in The Eagle. The quality of the humor in the three issues he edited was far higher than that in any of the rival campus publications of his day and infinitely superior to what can be found in similar academic publications in Nigeria today. Soyinka was one of the quickest of the campus wits at University College Ibadan in the early fifties, and he earned his reputation as a clever word-monger by making people laugh. He had an antic imagination.

If one wishes to seek clues to his literary opinions at this period, The Eagle provides a few rewarding hints, especially in an article on the "Ten Most Boring Books," which Soyinka had culled from an American magazine. After reporting that a poll of hundreds of editors, booksellers, authors and librarians in America had revealed that Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress, Melville's Moby Dick, Milton's Paradise Lost, Spenser's The Faerie Queene, Boswell's The Life of Samuel Johnson, Richardson's Pamela, Eliot's Silas Marner, Scott's Ivanhoe, Cervantes' Don Quixote and Goethe's Faust were regarded as the ten most boring classics of literature, Soyinka added:

> A good choice I would say, except in Scott's Ivanhoe and Cervantes Don Quixote. How the latter in particular was included in the list beats me completely. And evidently those lucky people have never read Newman's Idea of a University -- oh, maybe it isn't a classic.

It is perhaps significant that Soyinka, as a young student, was turned off by all but the prose chivalric romances on the list. In the following issue of The Eagle he wrote, under the pseudonym "The Gallant Captain",

a mock-heroic poem which spoke of longing for the good old days of King Arthur when it was possible to rescue damsels in distress with romantic flair. Soyinka, who had written many gallant articles in defense of "ladies" maligned, heckled or in some way abused by his peers at the university, may have responded to the ideals and courtesies of courtly love, even while perhaps adopting a more down-to-earth approach in his own personal entanglements. As well as being a humorist, the teen-aged Soyinka appears to have been a pragmatic romantic.

The importance of The Eagle in Soyinka studies is that it gives us a bird's-eye view of the vitality, exuberance and intellectual energy that animated this extraordinary young man long before he developed into a full-fledged writer. We can see a sample of what he thought, what he did and what he wrote at this very formative period in his life. He once invented this motto for his contributors:

> A plateful of criticism
> With a spice of witticism
> Makes the correct article
> of food for the "Eagle".

One could say that all of Soyinka's creative concoctions have been a blend of witticism and criticism, but it is clear from reading his earliest writings that over the years the emphasis has gradually shifted from light witticism to heavy criticism. In his youth he could still indulge in innocent laughter.

After leaving for England in 1954, Soyinka appears to have settled down to his studies for a year or two. At least there is no extant published evidence from mid-1954 until 1956 to show that he continued to engage in such extra-curricular activities as creative writing and campus polemics while making the initial adjustment to undergraduate life at the University of Leeds. He occasionally composed humorous "Epistles of Cap'n Blood to the Abadinians" which he sent to his friends Pius Oleghe and Ralph Opara,

the new editors of The Eagle and The Criterion, where at least one of these letters was published in 1955. It is clear from this sample that he enjoyed regaling his friends with tall tales about life in the British Isles:

Hallo Ed.,

I'm sure you must be hoping that I'm dead -- and when I say you I mean of course your readers (usually no more than six or seven) who must be glad that I no longer smear the pages of the "Eagle" with my nib. No such luck, I'm afraid. You ought to know I'm pret hard to kill. Why, only yesterday a car bumped into me and had to be taken to the Scrap-Iron Dealer, while I walked home with no worse damage than some engine-oil on my trousers.

Well, I suppose that story is as good as any to begin with but I'm sure you never believe it -- just because you fellows never believe me when I'm telling you the truth. You'll want to know what I think of England, no doubt. Well, it's a wonderful place to live in. Even the climate is not unbearable. The only thing I quarrel with in the climate is the frequent gales. These gales, you'd better know, don't come once in a grey sun; they come without warning (except when B.B.C. Weather forecast has remarkable luck) and they are strong enough to blow your teeth into your throat. But I must admit to myself that it does me a world of good to watch men and women (the fatter the better) chasing their hats or shawls for a couple of thousand of yards.

Only yesterday I stood at the bus-stop and one of these gales was fooling around just then. Well, a friend of mine came along, and he stretched out his hand for a handshake. D'you know what happened? The wind bent his hand gradually backwards, and before he knew where he was, he was shaking hands with the person standing behind him. If that doesn't give you an idea of the strength of these "breezes", nothing ever will. □

Though Soyinka did not start writing for the stage while he was at Leeds, Gerald Moore states that some of his early satirical poetry, such as "The Other Immigrant," was written there before he obtained his B.A. in 1957. What is not generally known is that Soyinka also wrote a good deal of fiction in his late undergraduate years. In 1956, for example, he was awarded second prize in the Margaret Wrong Memorial Fund writing competition for a fiction entry entitled "Oji River." He also published at least two short stories in a University of Leeds magazine called The Gryphon and contributed another to New Nigeria Forum, a Nigerian students' journal based in London. Since it would take too much space to reproduce these stories in full, here is a brief synopsis of each.

"Madame Etienne's Establishment," which appeared in the March 1957 issue of The Gryphon, is a hilarious Chaucerian tale of sexual duplicity. Told in the leisurely, familiar style of a witty confidante, it describes how a clever Parisian madam contrives to marry a foolish provincial barber in order to convert his barber shop into a prosperous rural bordello. This is accomplished without the husband ever realizing what is going on. Persuaded to believe that she has merely changed the place into a high-class hair dressing salon, he goes off to his farm each day, leaving all the hairy details of the new business to his wife and her numerous buxom assistants from the metropole. The establishment thrives and becomes a major French tourist attraction. Only toward the end of the story does a crisis threaten. Monsieur Etienne returns home early one day and finds Petjones, the ex-Mayor of the town, in the waiting room.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Etienne.

"I came for a hair-cut of course", replied the miscreant.

"A hair-cut?" laughed Etienne. "Why, you haven't a hair on your head!"

It was true indeed. Petjones's head shone with the bald brilliance of fifty years' careless living. But at that moment, it also housed a

measure of active matter, which was now working furiously, and eventually succeeded in producing the outrageous lie that,

"It was a mere slip of the tongue. I really come here every week for a scalp massage. It is meant to make my hair grow again".

Etienne looked at the man, and he pitied him. Then he looked at the terrified girls, and he despised them. He looked all round the room, at the expensive furniture, and the plush-carpeted floor. And he smiled bitterly. For he knew at last what vile methods had been used to pay for the luxury.

He had always considered his business and his name impeccable. But now a huge light shone on the rottenness, and he realised at last the dishonesty of the foundation on which his reputation as a hair-dresser had been built. This was what Valeise had meant by her Parisian methods.

He felt disgraced and polluted for ever, and the veins of anger swelled in the muscles of his bull neck.

"Send Madame to me at once", he snapped at the girls. "I shall be waiting for her in her private room".

Soyinka then allows suspense to build up for a few paragraphs while Petjones trics to take French leave of the establishment. Finally there is the climactic confrontation scene:

Monsieur Etienne wasted no time at all when he stood face to face with his wife. He seized her by the shoulders, and the scared and guilt look on her face confirmed the very worst of his suspicions. Valeise gasped with pain and terror as his powerful fingers dug into her flesh and brought her mercenary face within an inch of his own livid countenance:

"Madame", he spat, "Have you thought of what will happen to us when Monsieur Petjones, and the others you have swindled, discover that you have no means of making their hair grow!?"

It was marvellously orchestrated [illegible] scenes such as this, scenes which swell up magnificently until Soyinka suddenly deflates the melodrama by letting it burst into comedy, that gave evidence of Soyinka's maturing theatrical instincts. He obviously knew how to keep an audience entertained, [illegible].

Soyinka's next story for The Gryphon was a mock-fable set in Africa in the early nineteenth century. Entitled "A Tale of Two Cities," it told of court intrigues and missionary conspiracies in the palace of King Kupamiti of Abeolumo. This young king, an early convert to Christianity, had been persuaded by the missionaries to give up four of his five wives and to take on a private tutor named Oddy Summers so future princes and princesses could be instructed in the ways of Western life. One of the first services Summers is called upon to perform for the royal household is to provide secret assistance for Kupamiti's queen who discovers she is barren. Both are aware that this news must be kept from the king lest the queen and Christianity be expelled from the kingdom. Summers carefully arranges for a twin baby discarded by a pagan village to be retrieved from the forest and pronounced the queen's miraculously-conceived son. The stratagem works, the bastard heir is christened Prince James, the kingdom rejoices and celebrates the immunity from British taxation that this continuation of the royal line ensures, and king Kupamiti and his queen are presented with a special gift from the British crown to commemorate the historic event and to create an indissoluble link between [illegible] the dynasties of the two nations. The gift is a bed-warming pan.

Soyinka tells this zany tale with characteristic [illegible] wit and ebullient imagination. Again he opts for amusing rather than instructing his audience.

The third story from this period, published in the New Nigeria Forum in May 1958, also had the somewhat incongruous title "A Tale of Two Cities."

It recounted a harrowing episode in the life of Raymond C. Pinkerton Esq., a young British civil servant assigned to a colonial post in Lagos. To prepare for his stint in Africa, Pinkerton had heated his London apartment to a super-tropical temperature, had borrowed all the books on African travel and adventure from the municipal library, and had put in long hours at local cinemas watching Tarzan films. After three strenuous weeks of sweating and swotting, he boards the plane exhausted and soon falls asleep while reading yet another true-life adventure about a "mammoth spider which swallowed a whole cow alive and crushed wooden huts with its tentacles." □ When the plane arrives in Lagos, Pinkerton is still sleeping, and the official who has come to welcome him, thinking he has been overpowered by the heat, quickly conveys him to his flat and puts him to bed. Pinkerton awakes the next morning puzzled, then alarmed, then terrified and panic-stricken to discover that he and his bed are completely surrounded by a gauzy film tapering to a point directly above him.

> ...his mind went back to the book which he had read on his plane journey. Spiders! African spiders! A spider which would swallow cow, and crush wooden huts could surely spin such a web as that. Pinkerton began to sweat. His imagination was fired. He could see it all..... The dead of night, and the spider stalks into his room, and finds him lying helpless in his bed. Perhaps the monster had just dined and finds a juicy morsel like Pinkerton too large for dessert. So he spins a web round him, intending to retu after he has digested his last meal. That could be any moment now

In a blind and desperate fury Pinkerton flings himself at the web, and finds he can't break through, and struggles frantically to disentangle himself from its clinging folds. When he screams for help, an African steward rushes to his aid and quickly extricates him from the spider's terrifying white shroud, which of course turns out to be nothing more than a mosquito net.

this evidence of Soyinka's

Given [redacted] pronounced predilection for merriment, it is not surprising that three of [redacted] his earliest plays, all of which [redacted] date from his London years, were comedies--The Lion and the Jewel, "The Invention" (an extravagant political satire), and The Trials of Brother Jero. Since his career as a neophyte dramatist at the Royal Court Theatre has already been traced by a number of commentators, let us now turn our attention to his activities in the months following his return to Nigeria in early 1960.

Soyinka leapt back into Nigerian life with gusto. Awarded a fellowship by the Rockefeller Foundation for research into African drama, he was able to buy a Landrover and travel about Western Nigeria with ease. However, he appears to have spent most of his time in Ibadan where he held a position at the University as Research Fellow in African drama. From this base he made frequent jaunts to Lagos, at times commuting between the two cities almost daily in order to rehearse with those members of his newly-formed acting company (The 1960 Masks) who lived in the capital. Gerald Moore and others have sketched in the outlines of this very busy period in Soyinka's life.

What has not been discussed or even mentioned in the literature on Soyinka is his work in Nigerian radio and television in 1960 and 1961. The Nigerian Radio Times (later called the Radio-TV Times), a programme journal of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, [redacted] provides a goldmine of information on his performances and productions for the electronic media during this period. As early as March 6, 1960, he was on the air participating in a dramatic reading of his first one-act play "The Swamp Dwellers," which had been performed in London and Ibadan the year before. His program notes for the occasion yield interesting theatrical data. After giving a brief synopsis of the plot [redacted] and warning listeners that it would be "futile to seek a central character or action" in [redacted] this "play of mood," Soyinka describes the earlier performances as follows:

"The Swamp Dwellers" was first produced in London at the Annual Drama Festival of the National Union of Students on New Year's Eve, 1958. It turned out that there was nothing significant about the date. We called ourselves the Nigeria Drama Group, but this included a Ceylonese (Tamil), two West Indians, an American with a jaw breaking German name, and three Britishers.

We also had some Nigerians. Miss Francesca Pereira was our First Lady of the Stage -- listeners here are already acquainted with her talents.

Mr. Jide Ajayi provided unexpected comic inventions with his creation of the part of a goofy drummer, and Banjo Solaru -- of "Calling Nigeria" fame -- paralysed the audience for five minutes, during our second performance, by giving vent to a subterranean, earthy, odorombustious belch after the cane-brew swilling scene of the play.

It was the briefest but windiest ad-libbing I was ever privileged to hear on any stage.

Five months later, in the TV Times and Radio News, an entertainment publication spawned by the Daily Times of Lagos, there is a report on Soyinka's first television play, which was broadcast on August 6, 1960. This may be the only account available of this still unpublished play:

The Western Nigeria Television organisation reaches a significant milestone on Saturday August 6. On that day (at 8.45 p.m.) WNTV will screen the first full length play produced in their studios in Ibadan. The play entitled "MY FATHER'S BURDEN" was written by the Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka and has been produced and directed for television by Segun Olusola, WNTV Producer.

"MY FATHER'S BURDEN" is a human interest drama about the struggle between an idealistic young man and his father whose philosophy of life, in an age where every man tries to grab the most he can, is

"live and let others live".

The part of ~~Chief~~ Chief Nwane, the sixty-year-old father, is played by Nigeria's stage and screen star Orlando Martins.

This will be Orlando's first public appearance on the stage since he returned to this country about a year ago after nearly forty-five years abroad.

Chief Nwane is an aristocrat. He is enlightened, influencial and a former minister of state. He loves his son, Onya, and sees to it that he is well provided for to enter the world. But Chief Nwane is also pompous, proud, authoritative and blunt....

Wole Soyinka, author of the script, assumes, perhaps, the most burdensome role -- that of Chuks, ostensibly Onya's friend. Chuks does n know a thing about Onya's character neither are they of the same temperament. He is no more than Onya's drinking companion.

Soyinka wrote at least one other script which has never been printed. This was a play called "The Tortoise" which was broadcast on NBC radio in mid-December 1960 and again in late January 1961. It appears to have been a rather unusual Anansi story. The first account of it in the Radio Times states:

The Tortoise in Wole Soyinka's play is different. This Tortoise is in business -- big business. In actual fact, this story is about the days of prospecting. I know nobody will believe that the Tortoise can ever have any saving grace, but this play is about one Tortoise who turned out to have a heart of Gold.

A later account gives more details:

In Wole Soyinka's play, the Tortoise appears under the name of Anansi. The change in name or rather the adoption of a pseudonym has not effected any change in character. The Tortoise is always the Tortoise. One would have expected Anansi (The Tortoise) to be a litt bit out of his depth with so much (shoot'n) going on. But no sir!

Anansi had his own "one shooters" even if he did not use it too often. He did not have to, you see. After all he had got himself interested in research work and by diligently experimenting with all sorts of home-brewed wine, he had discovered the most lethal weapons of all -- the Anansi Milk-Shake. You may well ask "what on earth is that"? My answer will be "the first ever invented homemade bomb", and the recipe is very very simple!

In all his exploits, the Tortoise has always had one family or the other as his target. In this play, it is the unfortunate Ajantala family. Yes, the Ajantalas and the Anansi were perpetually feuding..."You can take all your Western badmen and put them together -- the Kelly's, Bill and Kid, Cimarron Kid, Jesse James and all other what-nots -- and I tell you that none of their exploits will come near the havoc which the Ajantalas and the Anansi reaked on one another. Two out of every three murders which were committed in Plateau Dry-Gulch Saloon could be notched on the one-shooters of these two clans."

That was a long time ago. It all happened in Plateau Mining Town in the days when stories were not stories but part of every-day life. In other words, it happened ONCE UPON A TIME".

Soyinka's first TV drama, "My Father's Burden," may have been intended as a serious work or a "play of mood" similar to "The Swamp Dwellers," but this mock "Tortoise" from the Wild West obviously was meant as a free-wheeling farce. Soyinka was back to his old antics again, trying to corral bellylaughs.

The Radio Times also makes mention of another unknown Soyinka play entitled "The Roots" which was "played during the British Drama League" in 1959, presumably in London. No further details are given but one imagines Soyinka must have been active in the production since he was still in England at that time. On September 25, 1960, just one week before the ceremonies marking Nigeria's

full political independence, the Radio Times announces a forthcoming radio production of Soyinka's "Camwood on the Leaves," which had been "specially commissioned by Radio Nigeria for INDEPENDENCE." This play, broadcast five years later on the BBC's "African Theatre" programme and finally published in 1973, was introduced in programme notes by Abiola Irele as having been inspired by some traditional Yoruba songs," especially "one of the best known traditional songs of the Yorubas, 'Agbe'," which concerns "Camwood (Osun), a bright red dye with which the new child is bathed." These traditional songs were apparently incorporated in the play without substantial textual modification by Soyinka.

In addition to writing radio and television playscripts, Soyinka was quite active in 1960 in developing a new series of radio talks called "Talking Through Your Hat." Several of his light-hearted contributions to this series were later published in the Radio Times: first a hilarious medley of parodies on after-dinner speeches as delivered by a patronizing American, a pompous Government Minister, a long-winded "small-fry" master of ceremonies, and the oldest alumnus in attendence at the Sir Milton Mackenzie Grammar School Eve of Independence Old Boys' Dinner; then an amusing glance at the lives of lorry drivers and their scrapes with the law (a theme to which Soyinka returned in his play The Road); next a personal travelogue telling of the wonders of Paris, "land of flesh and bread"; and finally an attack on the concept of "African Personality" which Soyinka found as demeaning to Africans as previous stereotyped notions of the "African mentality." All these topics, even his serious indictment of the shortcomings of the Negritude ideology, were treated comically.

Although writing for radio and television must have kept him quite busy, Soyinka also managed to find sufficient time in his first months home to play a leading role in a university of Ibadan production of Brecht's Caucasian Chalk Circle; to complete the manuscript of The Trials of Brother

premiere

which had its performance in Ibadan that same year; to script, produce, direct and act in his most ambitious play A Dance of the Forests which had been commissioned for the Nigerian Independence Celebrations; and to publish a number of poems and critical essays in The Horn, a University of Ibadan poetry magazine founded a few years earlier by J.P. Clark and Martin Banham.

Soyinka was a regular contributor to The Horn between 1960 and 1962. Among his poems dating from this period are two dealing with aspects of the theater -- "Stage" and "Audience to Performer," one written in pidgin English -- "Okonjo de Hunter," one entitled "epitaph for Say Tokyo Kid" (a driver and captain of the as well as later as a character in The Road), the earliest printed versions of his now-famous "Season" and "Death at Dawn." (His major critical contribution to The Horn was a 19 essay on "The Future of West African Writing"

in which he argued that the real mark of authenticity in African writing was indifferent self-acceptance rather than energetic racial self-assertion. Early African writing he claimed, was dishonest because it either imitated literary fashions in Europe or pandered to European demands and expectations for the exotic and primitive. The first West African writer to produce truly African literature was not Leopold Senghor but Chinua Achebe

It is to Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart that we must turn for the long-awaited artistic and philosophic acceptance of the West African subject-character. D.O. Fagunwa belongs of course to a different class of literature. He is the master moulder, as Tutuola is the juggler, in the realms of fantasy. The significance of Chinua Achebe is the evolvement, in West African writing, of the seemingly indifferent acceptance. And this, I believe is the turning point in our literary development. It is also a fortunate accident of timing, because of the inherently invalid doctrine of "negritude." Leopold Senghor, to name a blatant example. And if we

indent quote

Don't indent 1st line any further than the others

would speak of 'negritude' in a more acceptable broader sense, Chinua Achebe is a more 'African' writer than Senghor. The duiker will not paint 'duiker' on his beautiful back to proclaim his duikeritude; you'll know him by his elegant leap. The less ~~self~~ self-conscious the African is, and the more innately his individual qualities appear in his writing, the more seriously he will be taken as an artist of exciting dignity. □

Soyinka's famous put-down of Negritude ("a tiger does not have to proclaim its tigritude") apparently originated in this remark on the duiker and duikeritude of which ~~it~~ it must have been a perversion, tigers being no more indigenous to Africa than surrealist French poetry. In any case, this early articulation of Soyinka's artistic credo is interesting when placed beside the creative writing he was doing at this period in his career. In his serious works Soyinka

evidently aspired to create authentic African art of "exciting dignity." His aesthetic philosophy was based on total acceptance of his Africanness.

Soyinka's impressive literary and dramatic accomplishments in London and Ibadan soon won him a measure of recognition in Nigeria. In March 1961, after he had been back home only a year, the ~~twenty~~-six year old author was made the subject of an illustrated feature article in Drum, probably the leading African ~~pop~~ popular magazine in Nigeria in those days. The headline read "Young Dramatist is Earning the Title of Nigeria's Bernard Shaw." □ The comparison was apt, ~~perhaps~~ and more prophetic probably more apt than the journalist who made it could have realized, for Soyinka hadn't yet displayed

some of his most Shavian qualities. He was known primarily as a humorist, a public entertainer, a campus wit, a high-spirited clown. And he was known almost exclusively in his homeland, where he addressed his own people through the most popular of the public media ~~[illegible]~~ theatre, radio, television and, much less often, ~~occasionally~~ ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~ print.

It was not until 1963, when his first three books were published (two of them in England) that he became — instantly and forever — one of the most important writers in the English-speaking world.

FOOTNOTES

1. Gerald Moore, Wole Soyinka (London: Evans, 1971); Alain Ricard, Théâtre et nationalisme: Wole Soyinka et LeRoi Jones (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972); Eldred Durosimi Jones, The Writing of Wole Soyinka (London: Heinemann, 1973); James Gibbs, Study Aid to Kongi's Harvest (London: Rex Collings, 1973).

2. Research for this essay was done in Nigeria in 1972-73 on a Younger Humanist Fellowship awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. I wish to thank NEH and the University Research Institute at the University of Texas at Austin for their support.

3. Information supplied by Dapo Adelugba, Theatre Arts Department, University of Ibadan. See Soyinka's comment below.

4. Cosmo Pieterse and Dennis Duerden, eds. African Writers Talking: A Collection of Radio Interviews (New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1972), pp. 171-72.

5. Nigerian Radio Times, (July 1954), pp. 15-16.

6. The following poem is the earliest I have been able to trace. It was published six years earlier than the poem Moore cites as "the first of Soyinka's work to appear in Nigeria"; see Moore, p. 6.

Chinua Achebe was working for the Nigerian Broadcasting Service at this time and may have edited this story for publication.

7. The University Voice, 2 (Jan. 1953), 21.

8. I wish to thank the librarians at the University of Ibadan, particularly Mr. S.O. Oderinde, for assisting me to locate materials in this collection.

9. The Eagle, 3, 1 (1953), 2.

10. The Eagle, 3, 3 (1954), 2.

11. The Eagle, 3, 1 (1953), 4-5.

12. Ibid., p. 6.

13. The Eagle, 3, 2 (1954), 5.

14. The Eagle, 3, 3 (1954), 6. This poem is quoted in full in my "Popular Literature for an African Elite," Journal of Modern African Studies, 12 (1974).

15. The Eagle, 3, 2 (1954), 8.

16. The record, of course, may be incomplete. It would be interesting to examine student publications from the University of Leeds to see if any contributions by Soyinka can be found there.

17. The Eagle, 4, 2 (1955), 4.

18. Moore, p. 6.

19. West Africa, 13 July 1957, p. 670. Manuscripts submitted for this competition were to be "not less than 7,500 and not more than 15,000 words," according to Universitas, II, 1 (December 1955), 3.

20. The Gryphon, (March 1957), 11-22. I am grateful to Tony Harrison and the following for bringing this story to my attention.

21. The Gryphon, (Autumn 1957), 16-22

22. New Nigeria Forum, 2 (May 1958), 26-30.

23. Pieterse and Duerden, pp. 170-74; Moore, pp. 7-15; Ricard, p. 228; Jones, p. xiii. For a description of "The Invention," see Charles R. Larson, "Soyinka's First Play: 'The Invention'," Africa Today, 18, 4 (1971), 80-83.

and James Gibbs, "Wole Soyinka:Bio-bibliography," Africana Library Journal, 3, 1 (1972), 15-22.

24. See especially Moore, pp. 7-9,

25. Moore, p. 9. Moore says Soyinka was awarded a "research fellowship which would enable him to travel widely in Nigeria, studying and recording traditional festivals, rituals and masquerades rich in dramatic content," but an account in Nigeria's Radio Times (3 July 1960) says, "A grant was made recently by the Rockefeller Foundation to enable 'Wole to make a survey of Nigerian drama in its modern development." It appears that he was ~~Of course, he may have been~~ studying modern developments in traditional theatre.

26. Gibbs, p. 16.

27. Moore, pp. 14-15; Gibbs, pp. 15-16.

28. Radio Times (March 1960), p. 5.

29. TV Times and Radio News, 28 July 1960, pp. 12-13.

30. Radio Times, 18 December 1960, p. 3.

31. Radio Times, 22 January 1961, p.7.

32. Radio Times, 3 July 1960, p. 6

33. Radio Times, 25 September 1960, p. 6. Soyinka mentions this fact in an interview in Pieterse and Duerden, p. 171.

~~34. Research in African Literatures, 1 (1970), 153~~

34 ~~35~~. See Shirley Cdt Cordeaux, "The BBC African Service's Involvement in African Theatre," Research in African Literatures, 1 (1970), 153; Camwood on the Leaves (London: , 1973)

35. Radio Times, 25 September 1960, p. 6.

36. Radio Times, 3 July 1960, p. 6.

37. Radio Times, 11 September 1960, p. 7.

38. Radio Times, 18 September 1960, p. 7.

39. Radio Times, 4 December 1960, pp. 6-7.

40. Radio Times, 22 January 1961, pp. 6-7.

41. Ibadan, 9 (1960), 20; Moore, p. 15.

42. Ibid.

43. Moore, p. 15; Gibbs, pp. 16-17. Reviews of the performance can be found in Ibadan, 10 (1960), 30-32, and African Horizon, 2 (January 1961), pp. 8-11.

44. For a history of this magazine, see W.H. Stevenson's article in a forthcoming issue of Research in African Literatures.

45. "Stage," The Horn, 4, 1 (1960), 1; "Audience to Performer," The Horn, 4, 1 (1960), 4; "Proverb: Okonjo de Hunter," The Horn, 3, 3 (1960), 6-7; "epitaph for Say Tokyo Kid," The Horn, 4, 5 (1962), 10-11; "Season," The Horn, 4, 2 (1961), 2; "death in the dawn," The Horn, 4, 6 (1962), 2-3. Other poems of his in this magazine are "Poisoners of the World, Unite," The Horn, 3, 3 (1960), 4-5,9, and "Committee Man," The Horn, 4, 3 (1961), 10-11.

46. The Horn, 4, 1 (1960), 10-16.

47. Janheinz Jahn quotes Soyinka's later elaboration of ~~the~~ this concept at a conference in Berlin in 1964 in his A History of Neo-African Literature: Writing in Two Continents (London: Faber and Faber, 1966) pp. 265-66.

48. Drum, (March 1961), 27.

WOLE SOYINKA TALKING THROUGH HIS HAT

Bernth Lindfors

When Wole Soyinka returned to Nigeria early in 1960 after nearly six years of study and preliminary professional activity in England, he leapt back into Nigerian life with gusto. Awarded a fellowship by the Rockefeller Foundation for research into African drama,[1] he was able to buy a Landrover and travel about Western Nigeria with ease. However, he appears to have spent most of his time in Ibadan where he held a position at the University as Research Fellow in African drama.[2] From this base he made frequent jaunts to Lagos, at times commuting between the two cities almost daily in order to rehearse with those members of his newly-formed acting company (The 1960 Masks) who lived in the capital. Gerald Moore and others have sketched in the outlines of this very busy period in Soyinka's life.[3]

What has not been discussed or even mentioned in the literature on Soyinka is his work in Nigerian radio and television in 1960 and 1961. The Nigerian Radio Times (later called the Radio-TV Times), a program journal of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, provides a goldmine of information on his performances and productions for the electronic media during this period. As early as March 6, 1960, he was on the air participating in a dramatic reading of his first one-act play "The Swamp Dwellers," which had been performed in London and Ibadan the year before.[4] Five months later, in the TV Times and Radio News, an entertainment publication spawned by the Daily Times of Lagos, there is a report on Soyinka's first television play, "My Father's Burden," which was broadcast on Western Nigeria Television at 8:45 p.m. on August 6, 1960.[5] This was the first full-length play produced in the studios of WNTV in Ibadan, and Soyinka acted in what was described as the production "most burdensome role"—the hero's drinking companion.[6] The script has never been published.[7]

Then, on September 25, 1960, just one week before the ceremonies marking Nigeria's full political independence, the Radio Times announced a forthcoming radio production of Soyinka's "Camwood on the Leaves," which had been "specially commissioned by Radio Nigeria for INDEPENDENCE."[8] This play, broadcast five years later on the BBC's "African Theatre" program and finally published in 1973,[9] is the only radio script by Soyinka readily available to the reading public.[10] Another radio play called "The Tortoise," which was broadcast by NBC in mid-December 1960 and again in late January 1961, has never seen print; from accounts of it in the Radio Times,[11] "The Tortoise" appears to have been a rather unusual Anansi story set in the Wild West and featuring a blood-feud between Anansi and the Ajantala family which is finally resolved when Anansi makes use of his "one-shooter" and a lethal homemade bomb called the "Anansi Milk-Shake."

Soyinka also took part in a number of radio plays, performing the role of Elihu in a dramatization of the story of Job broadcast on January 21, 1961, and acting as the "Voice" in a production of Alfred Opubor's "Children of the Sea" on March 12, 1961,[12] to cite just two examples.

Radio and television work did not absorb all of his energies, however. In his first year back home he also managed to find sufficient time to play a leading role in a University of Ibadan production of Brecht's Caucasian Chalk Circle;[13] to complete the manuscript of The Trials of Brother Jero which had its premiere performance in Ibadan that same year;[14] to script, produce, direct and act in his most ambitious play, A Dance of the Forests, which had been commissioned for the Nigerian Independence celebrations;[15] and to publish a number of poems and critical essays in The Horn, a University of Ibadan poetry magazine founded a few years earlier by J.P. Clark and Martin Banham.[16] He was clearly a very busy young man, a veritable dynamo constantly generating new literary and theatrical activity.

His involvement with the Nigerian electronic media was not restricted only to writing and acting in plays. On July 3, 1960, the Radio Times announced that "this keen intellectual playwright from Abeokuta" could now be heard at 8:15 every Monday night in "a new radio series of talks entitled 'Talking through your hat' in which his light-hearted approach can once again be felt."[17] Though there was never any indication in the weekly program guides of what Wole would be talking about, many listeners must have tuned in at this hour to hear his madcap commentary. In the next half-year the Radio Times published four of his talks, and if they are a representative sample, "Talking through your Hat" was probably one of the most amusing programs on the air in Nigeria's year of independence.

The first script to appear in print was entitled "The Old Boys' Dinner Speech,"[18] purportedly a transcription of postprandial oratory at the Sir Milton Mackenzie Grammar School Eve of Independence Old Boys' Dinner. The distinguished guest invited to open the ceremonies is a Mr. Bilgernon from Harvard University, who begins by unctuously praising the charm, grace, beauty, intelligence and marvellous hospitality he has found characteristic of Nigerians. Elaborating on some of these qualities, he says:

> The music of the night-clubs is for instance a memory I shall always treasure--high-life, such enchanting rhythm, whose greatest attraction is the fact that when one has heard one high-life, one has heard every high-life. It is this simplicity that is the charm of Nigeria to me; there is no pretence, no nonsense, simply that delightful simplicity which endears Nigerians to the hearts of we poor so-called civilised foreigners. There is such a simple dignity, I find, in every individual from the Ministers to the night-soil men whose silent transit through every town in the dark, their sense of duty as they rival the women in pail-balancing act--I have incidentally always considered this a feat of the highest order, this balancing of the most fantastic weights on the head, especially by women--but as I was saying, the sight of these men, with pails of night-soil on their heads, filled with a

sense of duty which in a sense is quite ~~chivalric~~ chilvalric (sic) and I understand--herid hereditary--this is a sight which makes one proud to be associated in any way with a country which can breed such devoted citizens whose very humility is the proof of their dignity.

Bilgernon then goes on to warn a Government Minister in the audience that the strike which ~~has~~ has been called by these night-soil men on the eve of independence

> can only mean one danger--Communism. I assure you sir, that this agitation could only have been Communist inspired. It is an attempt to undermine the security and the economy of the country by making your citizens lose faith in their own individualism, in the only thing that has always set them apart as unique human beings, the bulwark of Nigeria's sanitation.

The Government Minister replies by thanking Bilgernon "for putting forth this early indication, for switching on the red light, for sounding the gong of alert," and then announces that he is ready to take steps to resolve the crisis:

> The matter must be looked into. And I can promise you one thing tonight. I shall do everything in my power to make sure that the passports of all these night-soil men who have gone on strike are seized, impounded and confiscated as soon as possible. So much for that. Let us now eat, drink and ~~be merr~~ make merry.

A moment later the Minister launches into a long ~~spiel~~ spiel introducing the Guest of Honour at the Old Boys' Dinner:

> It is proper, no, it is more than proper, it is fitting--no, it is more than fitting; it is befitting--no, it is more than befitting; it is obligatory--no, even more than obligatory; it is incumbent upon me, it is incumbent upon me, your humble Minister to say a few words about this august personage, who [is] not only...our Guest of Honour, he is also the Oldest Old Boy. A Grand Old Boy, a benevolent octogenarian, avuncular in manner, paternal in affection, fraternal in sacrifice, and maternal in infinite patience....Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, and the rest, pray,

> lend your oricular reception to our Oldest Old Boy, who, one might almost say without fear of flattery is omniscient in wisdom, provident in exigencies, confident in adversity, courageous in emergency, combatant in idealism, colossal in dynamism, and dynamic in personality. Ladies and gentlemen, the Oldest Old Boy.

After this tremendous build-up, only part of which has been quoted here, the next voice to reach our ears is that of a frail old man obviously lost in the fog of senility. He makes a few incoherent remarks about how the world has changed since his time, and the program gradually fades out--or rather, sputters out-- in the middle of his fractured reminiscences.

Anyone familiar with Soyinka's later writings will recognize certain hallmarks of his comic imagination in this early radio sketch. The scatalogical discourse on the night-soil men anticipates Sagoe's hilarious ~~Voidante~~ Voidancy philosophy in The Interpreters; the bloated politician's empty grandiloquence reminds one of Brother Jero's incantatory nonsense and Kongi's extravagant dreams of glory; and the Oldest Old Boy has affinities with foolish Agboreko in A Dance of the Forests on the one hand and with the wise Old Man in ~~Mad me~~ Madmen and ~~Speic~~ Specialists on the other. Throughout the piece there is an awareness of appropriate verbal register and a tendency toward bold burlesque which combine to give each voice its own distinctive absurdity. Above all, the comedy is dramatic, involving not only four different characters in interaction (an announcer as well as the three "speakers") but also an abrupt humorous deflation of expectations which have been deliberately puffed up to abnormal proportions. Even as a young man Soyinka was the kind of jester who knew how to fool his audience with quick-witted foolishness.

The next sketch from "Talking through your Hat" to appear in the Radio Times was "Oga Look Properly," a monologue narrated by a salvaged passenger lorry.[19] This may have been Soyinka's first attempt to write about the world of lorry drivers, motor mechanics and police

inspectors--the hilariously lugubrious, life-and-death world of The Road.[20] The narrative begins at the beginning--that is, at the lorry's beginning, which is to say, with a bang!

I was born on a roundabout--yes, you might almost call me a Siamese twin. Cephalic conjoint--that is what the doctor said, the one who came to attend the one or two injured. He took a look at "No Road to Heaven" and he took a look at "Do Unto Others No. 2" and he said--"Cephalic Conjoint". They will take some separating! He was right. My two vehicular progenitors were locke in "rigor mortis" embrace, brought by the fact that "No Road to Heaven" was travelling at about sixty m.p.h. approaching the roundabout and could not stop in time for "Do Unto Others No. 2" whose driver was already in the innermost Paradise of Heaven. By this I mean that Rasaki had taken several whiffs of marijuana that night and was in such a state of bliss that that he actually imagined that the signboard read "Keep Right" instead of "Keep Left"! He was only doing thirty at the most, but it was enough. They met, impacted, the driver of "No Road to Heaven" leapt off and--even though you might say he was in the right--disappeared into the night and was never heard off (sic) again. Rasaki broke an arm and his lower jaw, but was lucky not to wake up in an actual Heaven. Then the breakdown people arrived. By now of course it was morning. After trying in vain to separate the two lovers, they decided to tow them just as they were. And it was in this rather undignified manner that they all arrived at the breakdown yard in Somolu.

There was, need I mention? A tussle between the two de-owners, but it was surprisingly brief. They both admitted that it had become impossible to tell which part of the lorries

belonged to which. So it was decided that one de-owner should buy out the other. And the de-owner of "Do Unto Others No. 2." being rather saddled with liabilities, he sold out to "No Road to Heaven". The motor mechanics of Somolu, being reinforced by Salawu Alagbede, the famous "Galvaniser-Specialis" of Abule-Ijesha got to work on the double wreck. Olojede Asumonnu, alias Man Proposes, God Disposes, otherwise known as the Demon Carpenter was summoned to put together the two shattered bodies and create a new one. And finally, if you go along Somigona Street, you will find a big signpost on which is written:

Patronise Adegbenro Brothers and Co.
Signboard, Notices, Motor Numbers
...And House Painters.
With Modern Electric Sprayer Machine.
The Fear of God is the Beginning of Wisdom
Say No Evil, Do No Evil, Fear No Evil
God will Provide
A Trial Will Convince You
Come One Come All.

Each line is written in a different style and angle: and altogether, there are sixteen different colours employed in the inscription of this legend. It was obvious that no less a team than Adegbenro Brothers and Co. could paint me, and such was the masterpiece that they performed on me that I at once got the nickname of ~~Iospeh~~ Joseph Alarabara. But that was only my nickname. My new de-owner, anxious to preserve the dual nature of my creation also insists on giving me a name which would be a mixture of the names of my two parents. He examined "Do

Unto Others No. 2" and he examined "No Road to Heaven" and he decided that the approximate equation would be "No Road Unto Others No. 1" (You see, in strict fairness, he also divided No. 2 by 2, thereby evolving the idea of a No. 1). And that, I'm afraid, is how I came to exist.

This passage, written in what could be called Soyinka's hit-and-run joking style, is full of local references and names which a Yoruba audience living in Western Nigeria would find delightful.[21] But anyone who has survived a journey on Nigerian roads would recognize the derelict demi-world described. After providing further particulars on "No Road Unto Others No. 1" and introducing its first driver Adisa Ojerinde alias Ekuro Ijero ("the palm kernel from Ijero [a small town in Ekiti Division]" or "the Ijero man tough as a palm-kernel"), and a police inspector nicknamed Ogun Epe ("the Lip"), Soyinka has the lorry relate an incident which occurred after the Lip had stopped the Palm Kernel for speeding and other related infractions on the road to Ibadan. The incident is told in dramatic form with a few interpolations by the lorry:

"Get down!"

Without hesitation Adisa obeyed.

"I might have guessed Adisa. So this is your new lorry eh? No Road Unto Others."

"Oga, na so so!"

"No Road Unto Others. Hm. I suppose you think that is a licence for obstruction on the road, for overspeeding, for overloading and for dangerously carrying a passenger on your tailboard."

"Ah, Inspector, a no 'overload.'"

"Give me your licence."

"Oga, come see for yourself, make you come. How you go fit see am from outside. Unless you climb

here and look for inside, you no fit see properly."

I must confess at this stage that I was totally baffled. What on earth was Adisa playing at. He knew very well that I was overloaded, and yet he was asking the Inspector to climb up the tailboard and place himself in a position where he could see very clearly. However, it soon became clear. I ought to mention at this stage that when I was was completed, I discovered that a little niche, about four inches long and one inch deep had been made into my roof, just where a passenger might have to hold if he was climbing aboard when the tailboard was shut. Well, even as Adisa was manouvering the Inspector to the back, the apprentice had climbed up and placed some coins in that little niche. Before I had time to give myself caburettor (sic) ulcer trying to solve the meaning of this strange action, the Inspector himself climbed up.

"You say you are not overload. What is this. Look over there. Is that not eight persons on that bench."

"Oga, look properly."

What do you mean, look properly. Do you think I have not got eyes."

"Oga, look properly."

"What more remain for me to see. In fact, where is your spare tyre?"

"Oga, look properly."

Adisa was sounding really desperate, why, I could not yet understand. Even his apprentice had joined him in this refrain. But the Inspector was adamant.

"I say where is your spare tyre. Show me, where is it?"

But now, there began a strange innovation in the Inspector's

movements. Gently, ever so gently, he began to caress my back. He was still standing remember, on the rear foot-rest, and he was holding onto the roof. Now, he released one hand and began to feel me along the top, gently. He had such long sensitive fingers that the motion was as soothing as a light drizzle or a breeze. And all the time, the chorus was kept up by Ekuro and his apprentice...

"Oga look properly. Oga look properly."

And such was the intensity of the plea that before they knew it themselves, the whole lorryload of passengers had joined in. "Oga look properly. Oga look properly. Oga look properly." Under such inspiration, it was inevitable that Oga should look properly. His index finger was the first to arrive at the niche, followed. (sic) His middle finger also fell into it, and with the aid of the thumb, he scooped up the shillings which the apprentice had hidden there.

It was as I said, the beginning of a long and beautiful friendship. I wish I had time to tell you about the different hiding-places which were favoured from time to time by the different drivers who were employed to kick me. Or about Kalamanzoo Joe who tricked Ogun Epe into looking for his money in the exhaust pipe. Ogun Epe, not knowing that after even two miles, my exhaust pipe could be warmer than a blacksmith's forge, foolishly dipped his usual exploratory fingers into the mouth of the pipe and was rewarded by a searing pain that wrung a horrified cry from him. To make it worse, the pipe was of the type which is flattened at the end, and as Ogun Epe had grown steadily plumper from the proceeds of passenger-lorry inspectorship, his fat fingers did not

immediately agree to be pulled out, and for at least five seconds, he remained there until with a superhuman effort, he tugged at the pipe, and he fell backwards.

For this, he was off-duty for a week but when Kalamanzoo Joe took me past his post again, he was on patrol, with his right hand heavily bandaged.

These two examples of Soyinka talking through his hat -- i.e., "The Old Boys' Dinner Speech" and "Oga Look Properly" -- give us an impression of his powers of comic invention at the age of twenty-five. His zany imagination, facile wit and flair for drama were matched by a remarkable gift [redacted] of expression which enabled him to tickle any idea into hilarity. At this point in his development he apparently was not interested in clothing his cleverness in obscurity or vague, resonant symbols. He just wanted to make people laugh loud and long. So while talking through his hat, he never tried to speak over the heads of his audience. He created public entertainment, not private jokes.

The same could be said of one of his later broadcasts that year, a travelogue on Paris entitled "Land of Flesh and Bread."[22] Though this was ostensibly a non-fictional account, Soyinka added plenty of comic embroidery. He says he visited Paris twice, once in the middle of an epidemic:

> Asia had just conquered Europe when I first visited Paris. You might call it germ warfare. The attacking force was of an invisible virus whose resultant inertia was nicknamed Asia flu. It is inevitable that my immediate recollection of Paris should be linked forever with this mysterious flu, since it had such unfortunate, and rather expensive consequences. I would never dream of taking a room in a first-class

hotel in any country, much less Paris. But this is precisely what I was forced to do.... Until Lagos opened up hotels, I would have said that Paris was the most exhorbitant city in the world.

After that devastating experience, he says he "did not tackle Paris again until two years later" when he stayed "for about three months, earning my living as a folk-singer." Among the things he learned while singing for his supper were:

1. that "during the summer, Paris is not the Paris of Parisians--it is merely a tourist centre. It becomes a sort of Little Rich America Overseas."
2. that "the Eifell (sic) tower is a complete bore...So is the Arc de Triumph. So is the Champs Elysses. (sic) In fact, the best way to see Paris is not to follow the usual Points of Interest which you get in guidebooks. As in any other city, you simply must set out and start walking. Walk in a different direction each day, and simply follow your nose. And at night especially. There are more wonders perpetrated in Paris at night than are dreamt of in your philosophy."
3. that one of the most amusing nightspots in Paris is a little cafe in the Latin Quarter called "La Methode" which is always "filled with that curious breed of human beings, the neither-nors,...the Third Sex, whose antics are as grotesque as they are disturbingly pathetic. Sometimes I would spend a whole hour trying to decide whether a particular specimen was a man pretending to be a woman or a masculine woman playing copy, or whether the creature had never really made up its mind what it was.

4. that the "clochards," the tramps of Paris "who have renounced all allegiance or responsibility towards their fellow men," constitute possibly the "most intriguing element" in French society.

5. that "Parisians are famous for their love of the belly" and are absolute fanatics when it comes to bread.

Soyinka's remarks about French bread are worth quoting in full because they reveal his ability to rise to a yeasty subject:

> Talking of bread rolls—it is well worth going to Paris just to see to what amazing uses the Fresh roll is put. First you must understand that bread is not an item of food in Paris. It is just a habit. Lets see now, to what can I compare it here? Ah yes of course—the Hausaman and goro. Would you say that a Northerner was eating if you saw him chewing Kolanuts? It is the same with a Frenchman and bread roll. In Paris, you stumble over rolls. If a law of hygiene was passed—as they have in England—making it an offence to leave bread uncovered—the whole of Paris would go on strike. I mean, where would they get that amount of paper. The newsvendor props up his bicycle with a bread roll. The gendarme uses it instead of a truncheon. If you don't believe me, take a look at the traffic policeman. Often you'll find that the poor man has picked up a breadroll instead of a truncheon, and doesn't even know it. If a chair or a table has lost a leg, or one leg is shorter than the others, you use a chunk of bread. In England they use a book. I've seen students carve lampshades out of a hardened crust. Political demonstrations are officially admitted to take on a physically dangerous aspect only when the demonstrators are armed with bread-rolls. If you remember a man (one of the many) who

overthrew French Parliament and caused another of the many re-elections, one Monsieur Poujade--he was a baker. A baker! The bakers are indeed a formidable element in French constitution--internal or political.

When Soyinka turned to more serious subjects, as he did at least once in a broadcast devoted to examining the concept of an "African Personality,"[23] he still found a way to make his approach entertaining. He started this broadcast by talking about Shirley Bassey, a British pop singer born and bred in a seamy area of London yet hailed by British disc jockeys as a "world-famous Nigerian singer" because her father happened to be a Nigerian sailor. Soyinka says he found this amusing because it implied that anyone with a drop of African blood was regarded by Europeans as being genetically polluted. Like a cask of low-grade wine or a metal alloy, Shirley Bassey was too impure to be considered the equal of British citizens of unmixed ancestry. Soyinka then points out that the Negritudinists who claim that Alexandre Dumas and Beethoven were negro because they had some fraction of negro blood in them are affirming basically the same racist notion of negro inferiority. "In their anxiety to claim every public or famous figure for Africa, the Africanists are subscribing to the idea of inherent pollution by contact."

Soyinka admits that in places like South Africa or the Deep South of America, "it is necessary to be militant and aggressive in the impregnation of a conscious faith in black dignity, in the destiny of the negro as a race," but elsewhere such stridency is out of place.

> I know that I am not proud to be an African. Nor am I ashamed to be an African. I simply accept the fact as a normal, unhysterical phenomenon. I am an African and that is that.

Soyinka goes on to ridicule the old colonial notion of a primitive "African mentality" which makes Africans fundamentally different from Europeans. Most educated Africans, he notes, would reject this outdated concept as a racial slur, yet some of these same intellectuals now

> demand that we accept a new concept of the African. His personality. His mentality was an insult, but his personality is not? I find neither a compliment, because they both imply that the African is some peculiar animal, with peculiar characteristics that set him apart from the human race. It is no use trying to romanticise these characteristics--the implication still exists.

Soyinka also believes that negritude leads to a type of mental laziness that destroys literary art:

> Of all the bad poems ever written by West Africans. Of all the lazy poems, the unpoetic poems, you will find that the negritudinous poems take the share of the lion's head. It seems rhythm, blood, blood, rhythm, blood plus rhythm plus blood with rhythm again--if repeated often and fervently enough constitute brilliant poem already. (sic)

Soyinka concludes his remarks by reiterating his main point:

> The final proof of negro humanity is in the human variety of its individuals, and the proof of negro maturity is his unhysterical acceptance [of] himself. Dignity, to me, has always been a quality quite incapable of being forced. The louder it is, the more ludicrous the object becomes. The whole concept of negritude is, for this reason, partially false. It began by being the cry of need by French dominated Africans who had become assimilated and deculturised. It is perhaps an inevitable

phase—certainly no more than the temporary Euphoria of the dope addict. The African Personality is several and any attempt to straight-jacket him is a travesty of his humanity.

By the time Soyinka finishes, we have been taken a long distance from Shirley Bassey but it has been a fascinating excursion. As in his travelogue on Paris, we have been entertained by his wit, ingenuity, and shrewd arguments. Even when dealing with a serious subject, Soyinka could not totally suppress his sense of humor. Ridicule remains his major mode of persuasion. He makes us laugh at what he attacks

3 spaces

Soyinka gave many more radio talks and performances before accepting a position in 1962 as Lecturer in English at the University of Ife in Ibadan. For instance, on April 7, 1961, he read a part in Yemi Lijadu's "Okonkwo," a radio adaptation of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart.[24] A few months later he participated in a Sunday night NBC radio series on "the African Novel" by speaking on William Conton, Amos Tutuola and D.O. Fagunwa.[25] Though the scripts of most of these plays and talks do not exist in printed form and may never be recovered,[27] but the few that have survived in the pages of the Radio Times give us a revealing glimpse of Wole Soyinka's genius in embryo. He was soon to hatch out of the local media and earn a place on a much wider international stage, but during this transitional period, these growing fast and discover two-and-a-half years of electronic incubation, he was finding a very satisfying outlet for his maturing talents. Literary scholars and critics who ignore such an important formative phase in Soyinka's career do so only at the risk of talking through their hats.

His activities can be easily traced in the weekly or monthly program guides published by Nigerian radio and television broadcasting companies.[26] Unfortunately,

FOOTNOTES

1. Gerald Moore, Wole Soyinka (London: Evans, 1971), p. 9. Moore says Soyinka was awarded a "research fellowship which would enable him to travel widely in Nigeria, studying and recording traditiona festivals, rituals and masquerades rich in dramatic conten but an account in Nigeria's Radio Times (3 July 1960) says, "A grant was made recently by the Rockefeller Foundation to enable 'Wole to make a survey of Nigerian drama in its modern development It appears that he was studying modern developments in traditional theatre.

2. James Gibbs, "Wole Soyinka: Bio-Bibliography," Africana Library Journal, 3, 1 (1972), 16.

3. Moore, pp. 14-15; Gibbs, pp. 15-16; Alain Ricard, Théâtre et nationalisme Wole Soyinka et LeRoi Jones (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972), p.6 Eldred Jones, The Writing of Wole Soyinka (London: Heinemann, 1973 p. 10.

4. Radio Times (March 1960), p. 5. Reviews of the Ibadan production appeared in Black Orpheus, 6 (1959), 50-51, and Ibadan, 6 (1959), 27-29.

5. TV Times and Radio News, 28 July 1960, pp. 12-13.

6. Ibid.

7. Judging from the description given of the play (Ibid.), it was not a version of "Camwood on the Leaves."

8. Radio Times, 25 September 1960, p. 6. Soyinka mentions this fact in an interview in African Writers Talking, ed. Cosmo Pieterse and Dennis Duerden (New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1972), p. 171.

9. Camwood on the Leaves (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973). The BBC production is mentioned in Shirley Cordeaux, "The BBC African Service's Involvement in African Theatre," Research in African Literatures,

1 (1970), 153. It was broadcast on March 21, 1965.

10. Cordeaux (p. 153) also mentions a BBC production of another radio play by Soyinka entitled "The Detainee" which was broadcast on September 5, 1965.

11. Radio Times, 18 December 1960, p. 3; Radio Times, 22 January 1961, p. 7

12. Radio Times, 15 January 1961; Radio Times, 12 March 1961, p. 10.

13. Ibadan, 9 (1960), 20; Moore, p. 15. The play was performed on Feb. 18, 1960.

14. Ibid.

15. Moore, p. 15; Gibbs, pp. 16-17. Reviews of the performance can be found in Ibadan, 10 (1960), 30-32, and African Horizon, 2 (January 1961), 8-11.

16. See, e.g., "Poisoners of the World, Unite," The Horn, 3, 3 (1960), 4-5, 9; "Proverb: Okonjo de Hunter," The Horn, 3, 3 (1960), 6-7; "Stage," The Horn, 4,1 (1960), 1; "Audience to Performer," The Horn, 4, 1 (1960), 4; and "The Future of West African Writing," The Horn, 4, 1 (1960), 10-16. For a history of this magazine, see W.H. Stevenson, "The Horn: What it was and what it did," Research in African Literatures, 5, 2 (1974).

17. Radio Times, 3 July 1960, p. 6.

18. Radio Times, 11 September 1960, p. 7. Quotations are taken from this source.

19. Radio Times, 18 September 1960, p. 7. Quotations are taken from this source.

20. Soyinka also published a poem called "epitaph for Say Tokyo Kid," The Horn, 4, 5 (1962), 10-11, which makes use of one of the characters which later appeared in The Road.

21. For example, most of the forenames (Rasaki, Salawu, Adisa) are Muslim names which sound funny to Yorubas, the place names are

taken from communities in or near Lagos (Somolu, Ijesha, Ijero), and at least one name, Joseph Alarabara ("Joseph of the Coat of Many Colors") has Biblical overtones. I am in debt to Dapo Adelugba for this information.

22. Radio Times, 4 December 1960, pp. 6-7. Quotations are taken from this source.

23. Radio Times, 22 January 1961, pp. 6-7. Quotations are taken from this source.

24. Radio Times, 2 April 1961, p. 14; Radio Times, 7 May 1961, p. 14. An earlier preview of this program appears in Radio Times, 21 August 1960, p. 9.

25. Radio Times, 16 July 1961, p. 2; Radio Times, 23 July 1961, p. 2.

26. In addition to the Radio Times (later the Radio-TV Times), one can check the TV Times and Radio News, the TV Times, The Broadcaster, and various regional guides such as the ECBS Radio-TV Digest.

27. ~~These publications~~ The radio and television publications consulted were found in the Africana Collection of the University of Ibadan Library. Since this library did not have complete runs of many of these publications (lacking, e.g., nearly all the issues of Radio Times published between 17 September 1961 and 1 April 1962, when Soyinka was still very active in radio and television work), it is possible that a few more texts could be found in issues ~~which I did not have the opportunity to examine.~~ available elsewhere.